



Providence is Turning Abandoned Mills Into a Greenway



The site of a former gravel pit, redeveloped into a golf course.

Providence, RI

The City of Providence, Rhode Island is looking forward to a new 4.4-mile greenway along the Woonasquatucket River. With help from federal, state, and local partners, the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project (WRGP) is producing a series of linear parks joined together by a 6.6-mile bike loop that extends from downtown Providence to the Johnston City border. The WRGP begins behind the Providence Place Mall (a brownfields site that was once an abandoned railyard) and ends at the Button Hole Golf Course (another former brownfield). The park redevelopment project includes the cleanup of two remaining brownfields, the former Lincoln Lace & Braid and Riverside Mills mill complexes, and the restoration of two abandoned parks. While overall completion is at least a year away, the Greenway project has already provided new recreational opportunities for local residents.

It was during the initial WRGP planning stages that a non-profit, The Providence Plan, along with the City of Providence and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), formed a partnership. This partnership, designed to clean up the Riverside Mills and Lincoln Lace & Braid brownfields sites and create the greenway, led to a Brownfields Showcase Community designation by the Brownfields National Partnership in September 1998.

Showcase Communities are selected by the Brownfields National Partnership to demonstrate that through cooperation, federal, state, local, and private efforts can be concentrated around brownfields to restore these sites, stimulate economic development, and revitalize communities. Showcase Communities serve as models for broad-based cooperative efforts to support locally based initiatives. Showcases receive up to \$400,000 from EPA for both environmental assessments and to support the loan of a federal employee to the Showcase for up to three years. Showcases receive additional financial and technical support from more than 20 federal partners, depending on the community need and program eligibility.

The efforts of the city, the assistance of many partners, and the addition of Showcase Community staff have ensured the success of the WRGP. Prior to the Showcase designation, the WRGP had \$3.1 million in funding secured from a U.S. Department of Transportation TEA-21 bill for the design and construction of the bikepath. This investment was

JUST THE FACTS:

- The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) provided a total of \$483,000 at two brownfields to remove underground storage tanks and contaminated soil.
- The state provided \$550,000 for park and trail improvements at one property, and EPA funding allowed RIDEM to support the development of a cleanup plan for a second site.
- An earlier EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant funded initial assessments on both mill sites, and \$180,000 in EPA funds paid for the cleanup plan for the Riverside Mills site.

Cleanup and construction costs for the planned park and playground will be nearly \$2.8 million, \$1 million of which has been provided through a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Initiative grant. In addition to a bike path, the park will feature a play area, a water park, a skateboarding park, a stage with electricity, a canoe dock, and a sheltered picnic area.

subsequently matched by \$800,000 in state Transportation Improvement Projects (TIP) funds. The City of Providence then passed a \$2.9 million bond initiative to fund the project. Approximately \$1.5 million of those bond funds were used to dredge the Woonasquatucket River downtown and to reconstruct and reopen both parks, much to the delight of local residents.

Key resources that helped to move the WRGP forward came from both the State of Rhode Island and EPA. RIDEM provided a total of \$483,000 for the two brownfields sites to remove underground storage tanks/vaults and contaminated soil between December 1998 and June 2000. The state has also provided \$550,000 for park and trail improvements at the Riverside Mills property, and EPA Showcase Community funding allowed RIDEM to support the development of a cleanup plan for the Lincoln Lace & Braid site. An earlier EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant funded the initial assessments on both mill sites, and \$180,000 in EPA funds paid for the cleanup plan for the Riverside Mills site.

Cleanup and construction costs for the planned park and playground at the Riverside Mills site will be nearly \$2.8 million, \$1 million of which has been provided through a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Initiative grant. Scheduled for completion by the end of 2004, this park will be considered the premiere recreational site in the area. In addition to a bikepath, the park will feature a play area, a water park, a skateboarding park, a stage with electricity, a canoe dock, and a sheltered picnic area. The Button Hole golf course, a 9-hole course with a driving range, opened in the summer of 2001, providing many neighborhood youths with their first-ever opportunity to play the sport. By the end of 2002, local residents will be able to travel to the Button Hole Golf Course along the new bikepath, on which the Rhode Island Department of Transportation has started construction. The Lincoln Lace & Braid site is now undergoing a three-phase cleanup, and will eventually become home to a youth soccer field.

Keeping the community involved through outreach efforts has always been a priority for the city as part of the Providence Plan. The Showcase Community provided \$100,000 toward those outreach efforts. Community leaders from the neighborhood had the opportunity to review and comment on technical drawings for the park's design at Riverside Mills. At community meetings, residents acknowledged that the WRGP will drastically improve their quality of life. The community is anticipating that this project will spawn additional reinvestment beyond the project area.

CONTACTS:

For more information on EPA's Showcase Communities, contact Tony Raia of OSWER's Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment at (202) 566-2758

Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>



Removal of an underground storage tank from one of Providence's brownfields.